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Honduras Blocks Overt Aid To Contras, U.S. Officials Say

Single Plane Load Has Reached Rebels

By Joanne Omang
Washington Post Staff Writer

Shipments of U.S. aid to counter-revolutionaries fighting the Nicaraguan government have been stalled since early October because of resistance by Honduran authorities, State Department officials said yesterday.

They said only one plane load of the \$27 million in humanitarian aid approved by Congress last summer has reached rebel troops attacking Nicaraguan positions from semi-secret camps in Honduras and Costa Rica.

Purchased medicines, clothing and other non-military equipment have been accumulating in warehouses in New Orleans and elsewhere, officials said, while frustrated rebel leaders seek a quiet go-ahead from the Hondurans to ship it.

The Hondurans "run the warehouses, they control the airports. If they say don't send it, we can't," one State Department official said.

The official asked not to be named because Honduras officially denies that contras operate from its territory. Similarly, contra spokesman Bosco Matamoros said yesterday that aid continues to be received. "There have been some technical problems," he admitted.

Honduras' stand was no barrier from 1982 to mid-1984 when the

Central Intelligence Agency ran a covert-aid program that funneled an estimated \$90 million in clandestine equipment to the contras. There are several theories on why permission has not been forthcoming for the overt aid.

The most common is that the Hondurans wanted no adverse publicity or incidents to mar their recent presidential election and that the armed forces are waiting for the apparent president-elect, Jose Azcona Hoyo, to clarify his position on the contras.

He and all other presidential candidates said during the campaign that they would oust any contras found on Honduran territory, and many Azcona followers have expressed strong support for curbing the program. However, U.S. officials acknowledged that "we are asking frequently" for the supply line to be reopened, and Honduras has been responsive to such pressure in the past.

Another theory is that close congressional and private scrutiny of overt aid has changed the contras' operating techniques. "Some people are just not getting their cut," said Leyda Barbieri, a Honduras specialist at the Washington Office on Latin America, a liberal research and educational organization.

Divisions within the contra leadership are another possible source of friction with the Hondurans, who have complained that they receive conflicting information from various contra operatives.

More conspiratorial versions see the delay as quietly encouraged by the Reagan administration to persuade Congress that only a covert-aid program run by the CIA can be effective. Administration officials have argued openly that the current approach is all but unworkable.

"All the restrictions put in by Congress made it infinitely complex, difficult and subject to breakdowns," William G. Walker, deputy assistant secretary of state for Central America, said yesterday. "Many on the Hill understand this, and that's why they aren't pounding us on the head . . . they have to shoulder some of the blame."

Congress has already lifted some barriers. President Reagan signed into law yesterday new provisions of the fiscal 1986 intelligence authorization allowing the CIA to provide intelligence data and communications equipment and training to the contras. It also broadens the definition of "humanitarian aid" to include trucks.

Walker said the administration would seek further changes. "We're hoping the next time around it'll be made a little bit easier," he said.